

## ALAN DALE'S SURPRISING DISCOVERIES ABOUT Mlle. CLEO.



"For Mlle. Cleo de Merode is a neat head and a pair of shapely legs, and she is nothing more. The head is covered on the outside with a rippling mass of dark velvet hair. In the inside it is absolutely unfurnished. I defy you to discover any cerebral furniture."

I SHALL not leave home, and me mother, for Mlle. Cleo de Merode. I herewith decline to cut out the gorgeously degenerate prince who cabled over for a floral mountain, with which to greet this alleged enchantress upon her arrival at Dingley's domain. He can have her, with her "mystic" beauty, her Botticellian countenance, her persistent "te-he-he," and even any torpid "talent" that she may reveal to-morrow night at Koster & Bial's. He will be securing a neat head and a pair of shapely legs, in the fond belief that it is a woman.

For Mlle. Cleo de Merode is a neat head and a pair of shapely legs, and she is nothing more. The head is covered on the outside with a rippling mass of dark velvet hair. In the inside it is absolutely unfurnished. I defy you to discover any cerebral furniture. I snap my fingers at every interviewer who has tackled her. I laugh at the incessant twaddle that a misguided duty has prompted. I have studied her in her own "apartment," at the Rue des Capucines, in Paris, and in Mr. Alfred Aarons's apartment, chez Messrs. Koster & Bial, of New York, and I say that half of the rhapsodies to which we have listened with pained ears are insults to the intelligence of the American people.

Cleo's beauty vogue in Paris is entirely due to the fact that her type is an unusual one there. They are accustomed to the French metropolis to the women who make themselves up in imitation of the farouche impertinence of the bulldog. Cleo is not farouche, and she is not impertinent. The slightly mystic atmosphere that surrounds her appealed irresistibly to the degeneration of Paris. For mysticism and eroticism are very closely connected, and Paris at the end of the nineteenth century is perfectly disposed to grow parietally enthusiastic over the semblance of a nun. To the American and English eye Cleo is a pretty girl, of the type that you can find luxuriant in Grand Street. She has the American pettiness of feature that is always popular abroad, but if you want to see that pettiness of feature more cunningly, more winsomely and more intelligently expressed, just go and gaze at Marie Studholme.

Hal! Hal! Hal! How they must be screaming in their sleeves in Paris at the news of Cleo's gigantic "reception" in this vast Republic. Quel potin, mes freres, about the lovely little ballet girl, who has managed to get herself talked about, in Paris they never mistake notoriety for fame. The former has a dark halo all to itself. The latter is blazoned as a luminous disk. In

New York the terms are synonymous, and Cleo landed in this enlightened city last Monday morning as though she were the most famous thing on earth—a sort of epoch in the artistic. May I laugh? May I say "Ha, Ha, Ha!" once more? Consider that I have said it without your permission.

I shall not leave home and me mother for Mlle. Cleo de Merode. Set the table, mother dear, and put my slippers by the hearth. Your Alan will not be tempted from his own fireside—train, by the lightly salaried lady who has come to us condescendingly for a few thousand-dollar weeks. Cleo's "renown" has been ascribed by a few to her hair, which hangs like portieres over her ears. I don't like it. I am fond of an ear or two upon a pretty girl. It is a sort of prejudice that I own in common with a few others. It must be fearfully awkward for that degenerate prince to pour his soul into the Merode's ears. I imagine the sensation of being obliged to say, each time that he has a sweet nothing to whisper, "Do you mind lifting up your hair, dear, so that I can tell you that I love you?" Ears that never ache are poems. Rhymesters compare them to coralline sea shells, to delicately tinted moulds, and all that sort of thing. A woman minus ears is about as pleasant an institution as a woman without a nose. The object that can possibly be gained is the avoidance of the odious vulgarity known as "diamond solitaires." The Merode woman can never sport them unless they pass through her tresses. The Merode culture will never be popular with our leading ladies. Imagine the unfortunate actor condemned to plough his way through a mass of towed hair in order to kiss—as they always kiss on the stage—the ear of his charmer!

The interviewers amused me. Positively they did. They made her say such lovely things from their own cultured minds. She talked as vivaciously, appears it, as did Yvette Guilbert, who is half brain, or as

did Anna Held, who at any rate has the gift of chic repartee. She smiled at them; she smirked at them; she talked about New York; she would have been willing to discuss art, the classics and any topics of the day. And I felt gloomily, for a moment or two, that I must have been an utter failure in Paris. I have seen her again. I have verified my Summer opinions, and I herewith repent that Cleo de Merode has scarcely wit enough to say "Bo!" to a goose.

The ballet girls—\$15 per week—in "Nature," or some of the bovine damsels in "In Town" are sprightly compared with Cleo de Merode. She has not a solitary idea in her head. Her hair seems to exude any ray of intelligence from penetrating. She is the desperation of the interviewer, and I felt genuinely sorry when I saw that bevy of humorous young men at Koster & Bial's last Monday, trying to es-

tort Klondyke nuggets of information from her utterly unresponsive lips. As a rule the Frenchwoman is one of the witliest conversationalists on earth. The commonest Parisienne can interest you. Even the washerwoman of Paris says bright things, while the saucy ladies who frequent the Cafe des Princes are veritable champagne bottles of effervescence. Cleo reminds me more than anything of a Swedish servant girl, from whose heavily enameled brains nothing ever emanates.

Strange to say this utterly uneducated dulness is not apparent in her face. That is the discouraging point. You think you are vis-a-vis to a jolly, spirituelle woman who is going to epigram you into ecstasy. You are prepared to wallow in her scintillations, and low! you are confronted with a speechless wax doll. The lady from whom I can fail to abstract a few pleasing remarks is quite an unusual creature. I've made premieres wax lively, and Wagnerian devotees give

forth gems. My idea was, when I saw Cleo for the second time, to egg her on to some expansive topic, and let her go. She is quite unresponsive.

"Do you remember my calling upon you in Paris?" I asked, just to pave the way for something, and not in the least interested to know whether she remembered me or not.

"Te-he-he!" she giggled. "Te-he-he! I remember you perfectly. Te-he-he!"

This was not inviting. I am not very partial to being te-he-he'd at. Then Mlle. de Merode sat quite still and played with a handkerchief, perfumed with some of those detestable odors that women patronize. She looked out of the window. She panted a little on account of the heat. She took a look out of the corner of her eyes at my perplexed entity, and there she sat, carefully posing for nothing at all.

"You told me," I went on heavily, like the ploughman in Gray's "Elegy," homeward plodding his weary way—"you told me that you dreaded coming to America on account of the crossing. Was it so very bad?"

She considered for a moment, then her lips bulged, and she said: "Te-he-he! No. I was able to endure it. Te-he-he! The Americans on board were very kind to me. They taught me the two-step. Te-he-he! Te-he-he!"

"And you liked the two-step?"

"Oh, yes, I liked it. Te-he-he!"

I got up and walked about, nervous as a cat. She didn't mind in the least. She continued to wave her handkerchief backward and forward, and to sit still as though she were waiting for something. And I said to myself, "Ichabod! My reputation is off." For it dawned upon me that I had undertaken a horrid mission, and I felt vexed.

"Your dances," I said, returning to her, "are, I believe, what they call classical dances, are they not?"

"Classical?" she repeated, in parrot-like ignorance. "Classical Te-he-he! What do you mean? Ancient? No, no, I have danced ancient dances, sarabands and gavottes, and all that sort of thing. My dances are just usual dances, you know, in short skirts of tulle. Is that what you want to know? Te-he-he! Te-he-he!"

She giggled a little in her chair as though quite aware that she was not doing herself justice. She looked rather uncomfortable, and the rug of hair must have been terribly warm. I felt inclined to say: "Put back your hair, Cleo, and don't mind me. I won't tell anybody."

If I could have put her at her ease by taking off my collar or my coat I would have done it. It seemed dreadful to see her there, stewing in hair, for the sake of a musty old Botticelli and a silly reputation!

"How grieved they must have been in Paris to lose you," I went on, butting against the stone wall of her silence. "Who will replace you during your absence?"

"I do not care. Why should I care? Te-he-he!" she replied, and I thought of Harriet Vernon's song:

She always answered ting-a-ling-ling, "Twas all that she could say. She seemed to live on ting-a-ling-ling By night as well as day."

"Yet you never were a premiere at the Paris Opera House?" This I thought might rile her and open the floodgates of her eloquence.

For a moment she appeared to be a trifle nonplussed. A queer expression came into her ingenuous, sunlike face. For an instant it struck me that Mlle. Cleo de Merode could be easily infuriated and desperately vexed in her own interior. She parried my question.

"I have appeared in various ballets, in nice little parts," she said. "I have been at the Opera House for years."

Then silence—silence deep and awkward. She enjoyed it in a sort of unthinking repose. I hated it. I drew a design of the Koster and Bial carpet with my foot and digested. Pshaw! It was warm and stifling. I wondered what the Prince said to Cleo when he needed a little conversational repast. And the interviewers—poor boys! After all, a dummy grows fatiguing, and a wooden Indian outside a cigar shop could scarcely be agreeable in a solitude as dumb. Idiotic ideas surged through my mind. Suppose I struck a pin in her. Would she say anything? Suppose I jumped up, and, apropos of nothing at all, danced a can-can. Would she be moved to some expression of disgust? To business, once more. "You may like America so much that you will never want to go back to Paris, made-moelle?" (Poor me, reduced to such banalities.)

"Te-he-he!" she cried: "Oh, te-he-he! I really must go back, you know. Oh, te-he-he! Te-he-he!"

"But suppose," I said, pushing aside the te-he-hes, "you meet some rich American to whom your beauty de diable is a bewildering joy, and he asked you to marry him. Then you wouldn't go back, would you?"

The servant-girlism of her mind was rather tickled at this. Sarah Jane is always amused when you tell her that you caught a glimpse of her "young man" in the kitchen. Cleo may own the sanity aspect of a nun—I am willing to admit that she does—but she has the intellectualty of a cook or housemaid. And so she was really amused at my lame remark—as an intelligent woman would have been disgusted with it. She said seventeen consecutive "Te-he-hes" for I counted 'em.

She te-he-he'd so persistently that M. Aarons came in to congratulate me on my hit. She te-he-he'd so vociferously that M. Forbet, the Police-Bergere agent, who accompanied her, and who is a very witty gentleman, entered in the dreadful notion that I was turning out attractive, in spite of my appearance.

"Would you stay under those circumstances?" I persevered, angry at everybody. "Te-he-he! No," she cried. "I couldn't."

I really couldn't. Te-he-he! Mamma is with me, you know. Te-he-he. "Did mamma come to take care of you?" "To take care of me? What do you mean? To take care of me? Oh, I understand. No-no-no. Te-he-he! Te-he-he! I could really have come by myself. I am not at all afraid. But I like company, you know. Te-he-he!"

Then I sought for Parisian news. I tried to draw her out on the subject of Yvette Guilbert. She had heard of Yvette. Yes, Mlle. Guilbert was still quite successful in Paris, she believed. Te-he-he. And Miss Held. Miss Held? Yes, she had heard her name. No, she was not in Paris at the present time. Te-he-he. And Sarah? Well, the Renaissance was closed at the present time. Most of the theatres in Paris were closed. They were generally closed at this time of year. Paris was very warm and oppressive. Te-he-he. And Duse? Yes, it was really true that Duse had been much talked of in the French metropolis. And from what she had heard, Mlle. de Merode opined that there was very good reason for the Italian actress' success. Te-he-he.

Not startling news, you will admit. Nothing very spicy, feminine or unique about it. Then I put a few more questions. Did she bicycle? Yes, she bicycled, te-he-he! Did she enjoy outdoor amusement? Yes, she enjoyed outdoor amusement. Te-he-he! And so on. I could have safely asked her any question on any topic, and put as much into the question as I chose. It would have made no difference. Mlle. de Merode's brain is hermetically closed. She is a Parisian topic, minus the Parisian atmosphere.

Of course, these are difficult days for music hall managers. Everybody has been here, from Otero to the Harrisons, and Chevalier to Cissy Loftus. The only thing to do is to make stars-to-be. 'Em as you would hear. Mlle. de Merode's reputation in the gallant world of Paris—a hemisphere diametrically opposed to the artistic world—has been utilized, and she has been brought over one-headed, but disposed to startle. May I never have to chat with her again! That is the fate that I wish myself. As her own home, or at anybody else's, she is precisely the same insipid, uninteresting and aggressively placid.

So much for Cleo de Merode as a woman. We must disagree with the Parisian estimate of her. If we approve of her as an artist we shall also disagree with that estimate. So in any case New York and Paris will probably differ. Cleo must have been the heroine of Harriet Vernon's song. Whenever I see her I shall hum:

She always answered ting-a-ling-ling. 'Twas all that she could say. She seemed to live on ting-a-ling-ling by night as well as day. And I repeat that I shall never leave home and me mother for Cleo.

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